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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000673

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MR

SUBJECT: ANTI-COUP PARLIAMENTARY STRATEGY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The President's of the two houses of parliament are taking different tactics in defying the regime based on the political balance of power in their chambers. Both are under pressure from the regime and both greatly appreciate U.S. solidarity against the coup. End Summary

Senate

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¶2. (C) Charge met November 13 with President of the Senate Ba M'Bare in his Senate office. M'Bare seemed initially more reserved and nervous than in Charge's previous meeting with him and he said outright he was unsure how the new parliamentary session that started November 10 will play out.

M'Bare said he and President of the National Assembly had coordinated their approach to the session with M'Bare deciding to preside over the Senate even as Ould Boulkheir has decided to boycott and declare the session illegal. M'Bare said the difference in approach was all numbers -- he has a loose anti-coup majority while Ould Boulkheir has a strong pro-coup majority. In discussing the composition of his anti-coup majority, the numbers were worrying. The largest group is composed of the "third way" senators who are positioning themselves in the "NiNi" camp advocating the departure of Aziz and the military as well as a prior or simultaneous resignation of President Abdallah. M'Bare saw this group as having 17 firm members and 3 wavering members. The second largest group is Ahmed Ould Daddah's remaining loyalist group of six senators while the third is the FNDD's five senators. Depending on the three wavering "third way" senators, the anti-coup camp is only 50% of the 56 person senate or a small majority.

¶3. (C) M'Bare said it is still his intent to use the session to pressure the regime. He will invite ministers from Prime Minister Waghef's government instead of Laghdaf "ministers" and will otherwise cause a freeze. He plans to eliminate the special investigation committee on Senate finances pushed through during the Emergency Session and create, instead, a standing committee on Senate operations.

¶4. (C) Charge clarified with M'Bare his own political future. M'Bare noted he has a two-year mandate as President of the Senate that will end in May. He had heard rumors that the regime was holding off on any political transition that could shift presidential power to the President of the Senate until he could be replaced by someone they saw as more malleable and, more importantly, by a White Moor. M'Bare

said he had not yet decided whether to run for the office again but he thought the anti-coup majority would keep a coup-supporter from coming in. M'Bare added that the regime was doing everything it could to push him out before May. Just that morning, the new President of the Central Bank, General Aziz' cousin Sidaty Ould Benhmeida, had issued instructions that M'Bare no longer had signing authority over the Senate operating funds accounts -- a move M'Bare called unconstitutional and yet further evidence of Aziz' attempts to manipulate parliament.

¶ 15. (C) Turning to the broader political scene, M'Bare said he was pleased with the November 10 Addis Ababa Communiqué particularly because it had hardened a somewhat wishy-washy Arab League position. M'Bare specifically praised the U.S. for having the most consistent and unwavering position against the coup. Charge noted that the unified international position would continue to add pressure on the regime and commended M'Bare for taking a courageous position of internal defiance.

National Assembly

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¶ 16. (C) Charge met later in the day with President of the National Assembly Messaoud Ould Boulkheir at Ould Boulkheir's home. Ould Boulkheir had moed the meeting up in order to be able to travel o Aleg and a ttempt to meet President Abdallahi who had been transferred from Nouakchott earlier that morning (see Septel).

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¶ 17. (C) Ould Boulkheir objected to the idea that he and the Senate President had coordinated their positions on the opening of the parliament suggesting M'Bare was being foolish to rely on a supposed anti-coup majority made up primarily by opportunist senators in the "third way" and those who are allied with Ahmed Ould Daddah. Ould Boulkheir was particularly negative about Ould Daddah saying "he can't be in the middle saying he wants a return to democracy while at the same time saying Abdallahi can't come back." He noted he was in variance with others in the FNDD in that he believed there was a need for a transition government and anticipated elections but, like the others, he saw the return of President Abdallahi as an absolute requirement to re-establish democratic institutions before any new political arrangements are put into place.

¶ 18. (C) Ould Boulkheir initially told Charge that he was boycotting the session because it was illegal and that holding the session was tantamount to cooperating with and giving legitimacy to the regime. When Charge noted Ould Boulkeir had told Charge last month he would preside over the current parliamentary session and use it either to create gridlock or force the regime to allow it to be the venue for a true national dialogue, he relented that the balance of power was against him in the National Assembly. Ould Boulkheir noted there was no Senate-like "third way" in the National Assembly where Aziz still has almost 60 out of 95 deputies on his side -- Aziz' so-called "Parliamentary Brigade." Ould Boulkheir noted that if he had decided to preside over the National Assemby, the pro-coup majority would have been able to control the agenda despite his protestations. By boycotting, he is able to undermine the legitimacy of anything the Assembly might adopt.

¶ 19. (C) Like M'Bare, Ould Boulkheir welcomed the outcome of the Addis Ababa meeting. For the FNDD it fell short of the call for the reinstatement of President Abdallahi in his office but it clearly defined an international position that Abdallahi remains the President of Mauritania -- firming up wavering Arab League rhetoric. Ould Boulkheir particularly noted the strong U.S. position. He recognized that the regime was trying to personalize U.S. resistance as a personal vendetta by the Ambassador, but Ould Boulkheir

recognized U.S. opposition to the regime reflected the whole of the U.S. government. He expected that policy would stay the same, if not become stronger still, under the incoming administration. He thanked Charge for the recent press release concerning Mauritania's MCC scores which he said had helped the FNDD defend President Abdallahi's tenure from regime propaganda. He understood the release had particularly miffed General Aziz.

HANKINS